



*The Church of
St. Asaph*

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There is a small memorandum book, dated September 25, 1887, in which are listed 87 names opposite amounts of from \$2.00 to \$5000. This is one of the first records of the Church of St. Asaph, and tells who were the original "subscribers". Some of these people came from St. John's Church, Lower Merion, and nearly all of them lived between Overbrook and Merion Stations and the Schuylkill. A letter of February 28, 1887, from Joseph B. Townsend, Rector's Warden of St. John's, to George B. Roberts, generously states that his parish will not refuse to give the required consent to the forming of a new parish.

On November 16, 1887, a group of men met at Pencoyd Farm, homestead of the Roberts family, approved a form of charter, created a committee to obtain a charter, another committee to have building plans revised and submitted to a future meeting, considered building sites, and adjourned. Those elected as vestrymen at this time were Robert Dennison, John S. Gerhard, Joseph R. Rhoads, George B. Roberts, Jacob Stadelman, David E. Williams and George L. Crawford, who later refused election.

In 1887, that part of Lower Merion now known as Bala and Cynwyd was a rural and farming community. On City Line from Overbrook to Bala Stations there were a few private residences and the Black Horse Tavern at 54th Street. The coming of the railroad to Bala in June, 1884, brought a demand for land, and some of the larger land holdings began to be divided into small lots. It seemed that no suitable site could be found for the new congregation at an acceptable price until four of the subscribers, George B. Roberts and his three sisters, Gainor and Rebecca Roberts, and Mary Roberts Jones, offered to give about two acres fronting on Conshohocken Road. The offer was accepted by the vestry on January 30, 1888, and so the location of St. Asaph's was decided.

The plans for the church building were drawn by Theophilus P. Chandler, a prominent architect of Philadelphia. It is a cruciform building of local freestone, with Ohio sandstone trimmings, and has been described as "a Victorian rendering of English decorated Gothic". William Ellis Scull, one of the first parishioners, said that the name St. Asaph was suggested by Horatio Gates Jones, then president of the Welsh Society.

Ground was broken early in 1888, and the cornerstone was laid on May 8, 1888, by the Bishop of the Diocese, Ozi William Whitaker. Dr. McConnell, Rector of St. Stephen's Church, Philadelphia, made the address. The first service was held in the completed church on Sunday, March 24, 1889, and on Saturday, April 12, 1890, all debts having been discharged, the building was consecrated.

While the church was under construction, a frame building was erected to serve as a temporary chapel. Here the first service was held by the Rev. Edward Shippen Watson, Rector Emeritus of the Church of the Redeemer,

Bryn Mawr, who was called upon to assist the young parish. An unsigned memorandum reads: "Trinity Sunday, May 27, 1888. First service in frame chapel, 10½ A. M. Rev. Mr. Watson officiated. Mr. Rhoads (Joseph, a vestryman) read lessons for him—had good sermon and full service, about 150 present, and 30 to 40 communicated; day was very pleasant, and all passed off in a very pleasant way." When the building of the church was finished, the chapel was used as a Sunday School. The stone parish house was completed on October 6, 1891, and the chapel then was sold and removed.

Construction of a rectory was begun in the summer of 1888, and was ready for occupancy by July, 1889. The erection of a stable and horse sheds was authorized in July, 1888. Mr. Chandler, who had designed the church and parish, and, it is believed, the rectory, made his services a gift to the parish. The cost of building the rectory was defrayed by a parishioner.

The Clergy

The Rev. Edward Shippen Watson served as priest-in-charge from 1888 until 1889. He was succeeded by the Rev. Frederick Burgess, who was described as "an outstanding man in every respect; a most excellent preacher; sociable, witty and lovable." He left in 1896 to become rector of Christ Church, Detroit, and later became Bishop of Long Island.

The Rev. Charles Sanford Olmstead served almost six years, from 1896 until 1902, leaving to become Bishop of Colorado. He was followed by the Rev. Harrison Baldwin Wright, who brought to the church a rich store of culture and charm. He retired for reasons of health in 1921, and died in 1941. His grave is in the churchyard.

The ministry of the Rev. Benjamin Newcomer Bird, who followed Mr. Wright, was ended abruptly by his sudden and untimely death in 1931. He was Dean of the Convocation of Chester, and founder of the Diocesan Church School Association. He is remembered by older members of the parish as a witty, affectionate and intense man, unselfishly devoted to the work of the Church. His grave is at the south wall of the church, by the lych-gate.

The Rev. Richard Taylor Lyford, D.D., came to St. Asaph's from New England in 1931. He has been Dean of the Convocation of Chester, a trustee of the Philadelphia Divinity School, and has been active in the diocese, serving on the Standing Committee and Executive Council. If the parish of St. Asaph is distinguished, as many feel it is, by an aura of general happiness, which seems to permeate it to an unusual degree, this is largely a reflection of Dr. Lyford's own personality and religious philosophy. He will be especially remembered for his energy, his humor, his many personal kindnesses, and his great gift of ministry to the ill and aged, and to those in sorrow or distress.

The Choir

The Choir was organized by William Ellis Scull in January, 1889, and was taken over by William J. Phillips before Easter in 1889. He served until 1898. The organists and their dates are as follows: Ernest T. Allen (1898-1902), Jesse Lewis Stackpole (1902-1903, nine months), William Forrest Paul

(1903-1917), Harold S. Balsley (1917, seven months), Percy C. Miller (1917-1920), Bartram A. Owen (1920-1942), and Edgar L. Wallace (1942-). Mr. Wallace has not only brought the Choir to its present high position, which is probably that of the best boys' choir in the Philadelphia area, but his fine influence upon the choir-boys has earned the appreciation and gratitude of all choir parents.

The Church School

One of the first acts of Mr. Burgess, when he became rector, was to organize a Sunday School. On Sunday, July 7, 1889, about 40 children met under his leadership, and he continued to direct the school for about three years. Henry W. Marston then took charge, and remained until 1908, when the teachers and pupils numbered nearly 300.

When Mr. Bird was rector, he engaged Miss Elizabeth Frazier as the first Director of Religious Education for the parish. She was followed by Miss Mary Evans, Mrs. Thomas Rudderow, Mrs. Lawrence H. Burton, Jr., Mrs. Edmund B. Wood, and Mrs. Richard G. L. Ayer.

At the beginning of his ministry at St. Asaph's, Dr. Lyford changed the time of the Church School from 9.45 A. M. to 11.00 A. M. to coincide with the morning church service. The children were in church with their parents, if possible, during the opening hymns and prayers, and left before the sermon for classroom work in the parish house. This made the transportation of children to Church School more convenient for parents, and was especially appreciated during war time when the use of gasoline was restricted.

The Church School attendance again almost reached 300 in 1955, too many to be seated at the 11.00 o'clock service. A family church service was held one Sunday a month at 10.00 A. M., followed by a class for parents in the parish house. This arrangement continued for three years, the parents' classes being taught by the Rev. Joseph Hall, the Rev. John Skinner, and the Rev. Thomas Horner, all of the Philadelphia Divinity School. Now, in 1963, the older children are again in church for the first part of the service.

The Women of St. Asaph's

Early parish Year Books show that the women were organized into various guilds for sewing, mission study, altar care, and other necessary work. In 1944, besides the Altar Guild, there were three groups: Group A, which met in the parish house for sewing; Group B, which met informally in the members' homes, and was called upon to cook and serve luncheons and dinners; Group C, which met in the evening, largely for social purposes.

The three groups decided to combine, and form the Women of St. Asaph's, with the purpose of furthering the knowledge of its members in the work of the church, and performing certain duties for the benefit of the parish and the diocese. Its first meeting was held on May 23, 1944, with Mrs. U. Grant Beath, president; Mrs. E. Kenneth Johnson, vice-president; Mrs. J. Randall Williams, treasurer, and Mrs. Horace Fleming, secretary.

Under the leadership of the Women of St. Asaph's, various committees have been formed to carry on and enlarge the work formerly done by the Altar Guild and Groups A, B and C. These committees are as follows: The Altar Guild, Choir Mothers, Church Periodical Club, Church World Service, Hospitality, Prayer and Worship, Program, Sewing, Surgical Dressings, and United Thank Offering Promotion. Other committees have been formed from time to time to care for temporary needs.

The Stir-Up Club

Founded to promote friendship between couples of the parish, especially those with children in the Church School, the Stir-Up Club held its first meeting in June, 1948, with Mrs. R. David Thomas, president; Edward Irvin, treasurer, and Mrs. Harvey Tull, secretary. It has continued to meet monthly, combining usefulness and sociability. Once a month its members serve coffee to the congregation, following the 11.00 o'clock service. The special project of the Stir-Up Club is St. John's Settlement House.

Ordinations

The following men from this parish have entered the ministry since 1931:

1. Frank H. Moss, Jr., was ordained in June, 1934. After several years as a missionary in Japan, he returned to this country, and is now Rector of St. James' Church, Leesburg, Virginia.

2. William Forbes was ordained in July, 1942. He served as missionary in Alaska for several years, and is now Rector of St. Paul's Church, Mt. Vernon, Washington.

3. Stanley Anthony Powell was ordained in 1949, and sent to develop a congregation in newly-built Levittown, Pennsylvania. After ten years of his leadership, a fine church, parish house and rectory had been built, and St. Paul's, Levittown, had achieved parochial status.

4. Jere Schindel Berger was ordained in June, 1956. He is now chaplain for Episcopal students at the University of Massachusetts.

5. John Reed Smucker, 3rd, was ordained in 1958. Mr. Smucker did not enter the ministry from St. Asaph's. He became deeply interested in the Church while in business in North Dakota, and after accepting the advice of Dr. Lyford, enrolled in that diocese. He is now working in an industrial area of Detroit, as an assistant at St. Columba's Church.

6. Hendrik Bernardus Koning became a perpetual deacon in December, 1955. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1961, to be a "working priest," who earns his living otherwise, but gives freely of his time to the churches, institutions and missions of the diocese. Since Easter, 1962, he has been serving as Vicar of St. Andrew's Mission, Belmont Hills.

7. Richard Hyde Hiers started to study for the Episcopal ministry, but while at the Yale Divinity School, he decided to enter the Presbyterian Church. He was ordained in the First Presbyterian Church, New Haven, Connecticut, in 1962.

The Endowment Fund

The Vestry Minutes of March 26, 1895, record a vote to devote the offering to be taken that following Easter to an Endowment Fund. This first effort resulted in the receipt of \$1,912.14 in cash, and \$535 in pledges, or \$2,447.14 in all. Each year thereafter until 1903, and again in 1905, the Easter offering was added to this Fund. The Rector and Wardens of the day, and their successors in office, were made Trustees of the Fund. In 1923 the trusteeship was transferred to the Corn Exchange Bank of Philadelphia.

In 1953 the Easter offering was again credited to the Endowment Fund. This custom was followed until 1962, when the offering was put aside for a new organ.

In 1956 the Endowment Fund had a value of approximately \$203,707 and it was decided to divide the Fund into three parts, not equal in amount, and appoint the Girard Trust Corn Exchange Bank, Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company, and the First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Company, respectively, the Corporate Trustees of that part of the Endowment Fund deposited with them.

Milestones—Large and Small—Along the Way

1889—At a vestry meeting on May 19, it was decided to make St. Asaph's a "free church". On July 8, the Committee on Systemic Collection reported that the envelope system had been introduced with success.

1914—Boy Scout Troop, Bala #1, was organized.

1932—The lych-gate, erected in memory of Thomas Duncan Whelen, was dedicated on November 6.

1933—A church supper was held on June 8, with a menu of lobster, chicken salad, cold meats, strawberry shortcake, rolls and coffee. Cost 75 cents!

1930—Signs of the Depression—Pledges 1930—\$32,000

1932—\$24,000

1933—\$24,500

1934—\$17,000

1936—A course on "Preparation for Marriage" was given for the young people of the parish and the Philadelphia area.

1937—Dr. Lyford announced that there would be no sermon on the first Sunday of the month, when Holy Communion was celebrated at the 11.00 o'clock service. His reasons were (1) to shorten the service to induce more people to stay to the end, (2) to teach that we go to church primarily to worship God, and that the sermon is supplemental.

On Easter the congregation was so large that, for the first time, chairs were placed in the parish house for the overflow.

The spring collection of the United Thank Offering reached \$234.41, the largest amount in years. Twenty years later, largely due to the unfailing zeal of the co-custodians of the funds, it amounted to about \$1,500 at each ingathering.

1938—When a new sexton, Alfred Aikens, was engaged to succeed William Armstrong, who had served the church for 45 years, the Rector offered

the service wing of the rectory for the sexton's home. The quarters were enlarged to provide a dining room and kitchen. The sexton was paid \$21.00 a week, with house, heat and utilities. This was a saving for the parish, and meant that the sexton would be available for emergencies.

1938—David E. Williams, Sr., completed 50 years on the Vestry. He had served first as Clerk, then Accounting Warden, and then as Rector's Warden.

The 50th anniversary of the parish was celebrated in the spring. The Rev. Frederick Burgess, Jr., Rector of the Church of St. Matthew and St. Timothy in New York City, and son of the former rector of St. Asaph's, preached the anniversary sermon. Spencer Ervin was asked to write a history of the parish. Some of the material included in this account of the early days of St. Asaph's is available to us because of the thorough research done by Mr. Ervin.

1939—Joint Thanksgiving Services with St. John's Church began and have continued to this time.

On October 15, the 50th anniversary of St. Andrew's Mission, Belmont Hills, was celebrated. While St. Asaph's was not responsible for the work there until 1897, members of this parish were largely instrumental in starting it. In 1942, we gave the building to the diocese, and St. Andrew's became a diocesan mission.

Because more classrooms were needed for the Church School, the basement of the parish house was remodeled, and an oil burner installed.

1941-1945 *The War Years*—The British War Relief group met in the parish house, and in the year 1940-41 knitted 347 articles and sewed 196 garments. Red Cross sewing and surgical dressings groups met in the parish house. The surgical dressings group has continued to meet, and gives its work to local hospitals.

Parishioners raised money to re-equip the Chaplain of the U.S.S. Boise, who had lost all his vestments and altar furnishings during an attack on the ship.

On May 30, 1943, a list of 112 men and women serving in the Armed Forces was published in the Outlook. This number later rose to 132.

Weekday services had to be given up to save oil during the war, except during Lent, when the services were held in the basement of the parish house. Coal burning stoves were installed in the parish house.

Although parish pledges dropped each year at this time, the parish never reduced its missionary giving. This parish, from the first, has been very missionary-minded.

1945—St. Asaph's raised \$15,000 for the Reconstruction and Advancement Fund of the National Church.

Alfred Aikens resigned as sexton to go into business, and was followed by Oliver Amlie, who is still serving the church with faithfulness and devotion.

1946—The annual parish election was changed from the second Monday in December to the second Sunday, the change resulting in more interest in and better attendance at the election.

1947—On Easter Sunday two identical services were held, for the first time, at 10.00 and 11.30 A. M. In the same year, joint summer services during the months of July and August were begun with St. John's Church.

Mrs. U. Grant Beath, a member of the parish, was elected President of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

Our Rector, the Rev. Richard T. Lyford, was elected Dean of the Convocation of Chester. He served in this office four years.

1949—Two identical services were held on Palm Sunday, as well as on Easter. After-church coffee hours began at this time.

A reception was given the Rector on October 18, in honor of the 25th anniversary of his ordination.

1950—The parish house was enlarged, the funds being raised by a building campaign, and by special solicitation. The cost of the enlargement was \$45,000. The addition was dedicated on January 28, 1951.

1951—The Bryan Green Mission was held in Convention Hall, starting on December 2. A busload of our parishioners attended.

1953—The Confirmation Class numbered 54, and the communicants were 958, both numbers being the highest in the history of the parish.

1955—On January 2, four men of this parish, who were studying for the ministry, took part in the 11.00 o'clock service. They were Richard H. Hiers, Hendrik B. Koning, Jere S. Berger and John R. Smucker, 3rd.

T. Williams Roberts retired as Accounting Warden after 29 years of faithful and meritorious service. He was succeeded by Conrad D. Barto.

A new kitchen for small luncheons and teas was installed on the ground floor of the parish house.

1956—On October 10, the Rev. Richard T. Lyford observed his 25th anniversary at St. Asaph's. Following an evening church service, led by Bishop Oliver J. Hart, a reception was held in a marquee on the lawn.

The Festival of the Seven Lessons was started on the Fourth Sunday in Advent. It was copied from a similar service held at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, England, and has grown more popular each year.

1957—A diocesan campaign for capital funds for new missions and the Divinity School was launched, with a goal of \$1,250,000. Our quota was \$22,000, which was raised in full over a two-year period.

Loyalty Sunday was started in place of the Every Member Canvass. Isaac W. Roberts, after many years of service on the Vestry, asked to be relieved of his duties as Rector's Warden. J. Roscoe Rhoads followed him in this position.

1961—Our Boy Scout Troop, Bala #1, celebrated its 50th anniversary on April 9. The Rev. Stanley R. West, D.D., formerly a curate in the parish, and connected with scouting for many years, preached the sermon. St. Asaph's parish gave the troop a new American flag, and the Scouts planted a tree in front of the horse sheds in honor of the occasion.

Much needed repairs were made to the basement of the church. New floors, lockers, and a dehumidifier were installed. The driveway was resurfaced. The cost of the improvements was \$6000.

A section of the churchyard was set aside for small plots to be bought by those who wished them for cremation.

1962—The pledges of the parish reached a total of \$50,000 for the first time.

